OLD ENGLISH

A historical linguistic companion

ROGER LASS

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TS

For Sue and René, whose fault this book is,
whether or not they intended it

Biology is more like history than it is like physics. You have to know the past to understand the present. And you have to know it in exquisite detail. There is as yet no predictive theory of biology, just as there is not yet a predictive theory of history. The reasons are the same: both subjects are still too complicated for us.

Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

. . . the search for explicative laws in natural facts proceeds in a tortuous fashion. In the face of some inexplicable facts you must try to imagine many general laws, whose connection with the facts escapes you. Then suddenly, in the unexpected connection of a result, a specific situation, and one of those laws, you perceive a line of reasoning that seems more convincing than the others.

Umberto Eco, *The name of the rose*

'Therefore you don't have a simple answer to your questions?'
'Adso, if I did I would teach theology in Paris.'
'In Paris do they always have the true answer?'
'Never,' Williams said, 'but they are very sure of their errors.'
'And you,' I said with childish impertinence, 'never commit errors?'
'Often,' he answered. 'But instead of conceiving only one, I imagine many, so I become the slave of none.'

Umberto Eco, *The name of the rose*

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Preface

This is an approximation to the book I wish had existed when, more years ago than I like to remember, I embarked on the serious linguistic study of Old English. I felt a great need then for something to bridge the gap between elementary Old English grammars and the standard 'philological' handbooks (Campbell, Sievers-Brunner, Luick); as well as a source of background for making proper use of the etymological dictionaries like Holthausen, or even the *OED*. (Why is Skr *lúbhyati* given as a cognate for OE *lufian*, but Skr *śaptá* for *seofon*? Are there 'two kinds' of OE categories spelled <f>, and if so, why?)

The closest thing to the sort of book I wanted is still, as it was in the 1960s, the invaluable Moore & Knott, *Elements of Old English* (1955); this does provide a lot of the necessary background, if in an old-fashioned and 'pre-structural' way. It explores the major sound changes in both Germanic and Old English, and gives an overall view of the morphology – but not in enough detail to make an approach to the Big Boys very easy, and not in a sophisticated enough way to help in the transition to the 'new' OE scholarship: the tradition of 'linguistic' rather than 'philological', but still historically based work beginning with Stockwell and others in the 1950s, and still going on, more vigorously than ever. (Some of these problems are now taken care of by Alfred Bammesberger's *English etymology* (1984), but this has a much wider coverage, and is not dedicated to Old English in detail.) And neither of these books (nor most of the standard grammars) has anything much to say about syntax or suprasegmentals.

This guide sets out in the first instance to bridge the historical gap by supplying the most important Indo-European and Germanic background, conceptual, substantive, and terminological; it also approaches things in a reasonably modern way, in terms of systems and contrasts and the interrelatedness of linguistic levels rather than atomistically, and with a basis in the theoretical developments that inform much of the current scholarly literature.

Traditional IE and Germanic courses are thin on the ground these days; it's not easy now for students to get up the kind of background that was

still (if fadingly) available in the 1960s, when a few of the Last Neogrammarians, as it were, could still be found teaching rigorous philological courses in some universities. This was the kind of training I had at Yale under the late Helge Kökeritz (who was also a linguist and phonetician); a combination of this with a certain amount of modern linguistics and 'revisionist' analysis seems to be what's needed. Students, even very bright and motivated ones, have trouble contextualizing in the traditional historical way. I have for instance seen no relatively introductory grammar that gives the sort of account of IE Ablaut and its Germanic reflexes that would make it clear why the present, preterite singular, and preterite plural of strong verbs have the shapes they do (or why indeed the classes are called 'ablaut series'); or why OE *byrþen* is regularly related to the verb *beran* (or more properly its past participle *boren*). Or, to take a wider view, why *cunnan* and *cnāwan* and *cūþe* and *cȳþan*, all sharing some sense like 'know', should be related and look the way they do.

This book is designed in the first instance to help students approach the handbooks and dictionaries with something of the kind of background the authors seem to have assumed, and which much of the modern literature also assumes, and to do it in a reasonably (but not excessively or trendily) modern framework, providing a contemporary eye to cast on the older works, and a traditional eye for the modern.

But I have something else in mind as well, perhaps just as important. This is to encourage a view of Old English not in a synchronic vacuum, nor on the other hand as a state of affairs interesting merely as a precursor of Modern English. Rather to see it as a (set of) system(s) emerging from and still implicated in a complex and ancient background, carrying in its structure relics of its long history. The idea is to set Old English (its phonology, morphology, morphophonology and some aspects of its syntax) in a wide historical perspective, stressing both its Indo-Europeanness and Germanicness, seeing it partly as backward-looking (a collection of lineages of ancient date), and partly as forward-looking (in terms of what it was to turn into) – as well of course as a language in itself.

There is a certain self-indulgence here, a pandering to my own fascination with historical inertia, the way languages, despite, or with no concern with, their speakers can maintain a strong and systematic connectivity over great ranges of time and space. There are certain classes of relation that are often not stressed, and ought to be – both for the sake of historical background and synchronic coherence. One example may illustrate the sort of concern that dominates much of this book.

The *-ne* in the pronouns *hine* and *hwone*, and in the 'article' *þone*, as well as the masculine accusative singular strong adjective, are structurally 'the same thing'. But they are also historically/comparatively 'the same thing'

as the *-n* in the Greek masculine accusative singular article *tón*, and this in turn is the 'same thing' as the *-m* in Sanskrit *tam*. Synchronically, then, there is justification for segmenting *hi-ne*, *hwo-ne*, *þo-ne*. Historically, the *þ-* in *þone* represents the same IE deictic base */t-/ as the /t/ in *tón*, *tam* (which in turn we can now see as *t-ó-n*, *t-a-m*); and the *h-* in *hine* represents the deictic base */k-/ (L *c-is*), and the *hw-* in *hwone* the interrogative */k^w-/ (Skr *k-am*, L *qu-em* with a different grade of the root). And so on.

I know that there is a post-Saussurean (pseudo-) problem about the status of historical 'sames' and 'continuations'; but historians can quite properly neglect this, and students ought to learn to see the larger picture, the essential conservativeness of linguistic structure even under massive transformation. Languages show a kind of 'persistence of memory', transformed morphs echoing Dali's melted watches. At least I tend to see things this way, and so did many of my predecessors. This rather nineteenth-century frame of mind is due for a revival, if not as the centre of linguistic inquiry, then certainly as a major part of the enterprise.

Another way of putting it is that (of course) a good deal of the structure of OE 'belongs to' OE in a systematic way; but a lot of it also does not, it's there as a matter of historical contingency. In part OE looks the way it does not because it is a functioning system of a particular kind, but because it happens to have had the ancestors it does. My nose, with its particular shape and size, is (of course) 'mine' in a synchronic biological sense; but it's also not mine, because it continues the nasomorphy (if I may) of my mother and father, and my maternal and paternal grandfathers, and probably who knows who how far back. As Elizabeth Traugott once remarked in a lecture, synchrony in one sense is 'a way station along the path of history'.

The level of preparation I assume is what would be supplied by an elementary Old English course, in addition to or in the context of a good first-year general linguistics or linguistically sophisticated English Language course. That is, a basic knowledge of phonetics and phonology, the elements of syntactic and morphological theory, and an introduction to historical linguistics. For the student with less linguistic preparation, the services of a teacher, or guidance in the direction of useful elementary accounts of problem areas, will probably make this guide usable. I have refrained, for reasons of space, from building in a mini-course in linguistics as well, though I've supplied fairly extensive explanations of difficult matters in the text, and a glossary, which provides at least a working definition of the major technical terms used.

The reader will note a certain disproportion in the amount of space allotted to particular areas; there is more on phonology than anything else, with vocabulary perhaps running a close second; inflectional morphology

is treated in somewhat less detail, and the syntax chapter is restricted to only two major topics. To a certain degree this reflects my own interests and competence; but it also reflects both the traditional concerns of the field (there is simply more information available on some topics than on others), and the susceptibility of certain areas to the kind of historical study I am pursuing here. Chapter 9 is more a sketch for a particular kind of historical syntax than a thoroughgoing treatment of it; there are topics that could probably have been treated but have not been (e.g. relativization, general patterns of clause-joining, etc.). I am not entirely clear on the best way to handle some of these additional topics in the chosen framework; I thought it better simply to treat two exemplary ones than to try a more fragmented approach to more.

Much of the content is quite traditional, in substance if not in statement; some on the other hand is untraditional, even idiosyncratic. I am indebted for both aspects of my approach especially to work by and conversations over the years with John Anderson (the impress of Lass & Anderson 1975 will be apparent), Fran Colman, Charles Jones, and Richard Hogg, all of whose footprints will be visible to the *cognoscenti*: both through pinched ideas, and suggestions of theirs that I've rejected, often at my peril. The total range of indebtedness will be apparent from the bibliography and notes. I am particularly grateful to Dieter Kastovsky and Fran Colman for reading various drafts and commenting in excruciating detail, and giving me an enormous amount of extra work. It was probably not very bright of me to disregard some of their suggestions, but just as this book is mine, so in the end are all the mistakes; I can't blame my pratfalls on my friends who tried to keep me standing. I am also grateful to Judith Ayling of CUP for having faith in this perhaps somewhat odd project, being constantly encouraging, and sweating over many a hot fax in the course of getting this thing on the road.

Last but not at all least, my gratitude to René van der Westhuizen and Sue Watermeyer, for wanting to do a course that included this sort of stuff, and being interested in the kind of arcane things that I like. This was originally written for them: altruistically, to serve the purposes outlined above; more cynically, so I could use them as guinea pigs. They were nice about it all.

Conventions, symbols and abbreviations

1 *Citation of orthographic forms*

If a language has a conventional roman orthography, this will be used except where phonetic or phonemic representation is appropriate. If the original alphabet is non-roman (as in Sanskrit, Greek, Old Church Slavic, Gothic, or the language of Germanic runic inscriptions), I use the normal transliterations, with diacritics for length and (where relevant) accent. I will comment below on special conventions for some of the more exotic languages.

2 *Length*

Long vowels are marked with a macron <¯> in all languages except Old Icelandic, where length is conventionally indicated by an acute: OE *gōd*, OIc *góðr* '*good*'. Consonant length will (inconsistent though this is) be marked generally by double letters, as in the orthographies. In general, where length is marked (as in OE, Latin, Greek, etc.) short vowels will be left unmarked: except when the shortness itself is of importance, in which case a breve <˘> will be used: L *stă-tus* vs. *stā-re*.

3 *Accent*

Except in certain contexts (e.g. chapter 4), accented syllables, where it is necessary to mark them, will be indicated with an acute <´> over the vowel; if primary vs. secondary accent is at issue, the distinction will be <´> vs. <`>. Acutes and graves are used elsewhere in different senses (see above on length in OIc, and below on Sanskrit, Greek, Lithuanian). The context should make it clear what's being indicated.

4 *Special conventions for particular languages*

(i) *Proto-Indo-European*: *[m̥, n̥, l̥, r̥] are syllabic consonants; */H/, with or without subscript numerals, represents a largyngeal.

(ii) *Sanskrit*: <ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ṣ, ḷ, r> are retroflex; <ś> = /ʃ/; <c> = a palatal stop or affricate; <ñ> is a palatal nasal; <ḥ> = [h]; <h> = voiced glottal fricative [ɦ]; <bh, dh, gh> are breathy-voiced stops: <ṁ> = nasal with the same place of articulation as a following consonant; <r̥, l̥> are syllabic; <´> marks an accented high-tone vowel.

(iii) *Ancient Greek*: <´> = accent (high tone); <ˆ> = accent (compound tone, rise-fall); <`> = accent (low tone); <ph> etc. are aspirated stops.

(iv) *Lithuanian*: <˜> = rising pitch; <´> = falling pitch; <`> = accented short vowel; /y/ = /i:/.

(v) *Old Church Slavic*: <ĭ, ŭ> = 'overshort' vowels; a hook under a vowel symbol as in <a> = nasalization; <ě> = /jɛ/, <š, č> = /ʃ, tʃ/, <y> = /ɨ/.

(vi) *Gothic*: <aí, aú> = [ɛ, ɔ]; otherwise <ai, au> = /αi, αu/; <gg> = [ŋg], <gq> = [ŋk].

5 *Morphological representations*

If morphological structure is relevant, the boundaries between elements will generally be marked with a hyphen: OE {luf-od-e} 'he loved'.

6 *Other symbols*

*	In historical contexts, reconstructed item; in nonhistorical contexts, ungrammatical or nonoccurring item.
>	becomes
<	derives from
[ ]	phonetic representation
/ /	phonemic representation
{ }	morphemic representation
s	strong (accented) syllable or constituent
w	weak (unaccented) syllable or constituent
σ	syllable
σ̆	light syllable
σ̄	heavy syllable
σ̿	superheavy syllable
v̄	long vowel
v, v̆	short vowel

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7 *Phonetic symbols*

(a) Vowels: −R = unrounded, +R = rounded

	FRONT		CENTRAL		BACK	
	−R	+R	−R	+R	−R	+R
HIGH close	i	y	ɨ	ʉ		u
half-close	e	ø				o
MID half-open	ɛ	œ			ʌ	ɔ
raised-open	æ					
LOW open	a				ɑ	

[˜] over a vowel symbol = nasalization

(b) Consonants: −V = voiceless, +V = voiced
L = Labial, D = Dental, A = Alveolar, PA = Palato-alveolar, P = Palatal, V = Velar, U = Uvular, G = Glottal, Fric = Fricative

	L	D	A	PA	P	V	U	G
Stop, −V	p		t		c	k	q	ʔ
Stop, +V	b		d		ɟ	g	G	
Fric, −V	f	θ	s	ʃ	ç	x	χ	h
Fric, +V	v	ð	z	ʒ	j	ɣ		
Nasal, +V	m		n			ŋ		
Liquid, +V	w		r, l		j	w		

Palato-alveolar affricates: −V [tʃ], +V [dʒ]; [ɬ] is a velarized ('dark') /l/. There is some likelihood that OE /t, d, n, l/ were dental; I will often use the term 'dental' to mean 'dental or alveolar', where no distinction is at issue. The grouping of [j, w] as liquids is nonconventional (but see Lass & Anderson 1975: Preliminaries); these are more commonly called 'glides' or 'semivowels'. I have listed [w] under two places of articulation, since it has two components, labial and velar.

ABBREVIATIONS

1 *Languages*

Afr Afrikaans; **Angl** Anglian; **Da** Danish; **Du** Dutch; **e** early; **E** East(ern); **EGmc** East Germanic; **F** French; **Fi** Finnish; **Fri** Frisian; **G** German; **Gmc** Germanic; **Go** Gothic; **Gr** Greek (Ancient); **IE** Indo-European; **Kt** Kentish; **l** late; **L** Latin; **Li** Lithuanian; **M** Middle; **ME** Middle English;

Merc Mercian; **ML** Midland(s); **Mod** Modern; **ModE** Modern English; **N** North(ern); **NGmc** North Germanic; **NWGmc** Northwest Germanic; **Nth** Northumbrian; **O** Old; **OCS** Old Church Slavic; **OE** Old English; **OF** Old French; **OFri** Old Frisian; **OHG** Old High German; **OIc** Old Icelandic (= 'Old Norse'); **OIr** Old Irish; **OLF** Old Low Franconian; **OPr** Old Prussian; **OS** Old Saxon; **OSc** Old Scandinavian; **PIE** Proto-Indo-European; **PGmc** Proto-Germanic; **S** South(ern); **Skr** Sanskrit; **Toch** Tocharian; **W** West(ern); **WGmc** West Germanic; **WS** West Saxon

2 *Grammatical terms, sound changes etc.*

abl ablative; **Adj** Adjective; **acc** accusative; **AFB** Anglo-Frisian Brightening; **aor** aorist; **art** article; **C** consonant; **cl** class; **comp** complementizer, comparative; **CSR** Compound Stress Rule; **DHH** Diphthong Height Harmony; **DO** direct object; **def** definite; **du** dual; **f** feminine; **gen** genitive; **GL** Grimm's Law; **GSR** Germanic Stress Rule; **imp** imperative; **ind** indicative; **indef** indefinite; **inf** infinitive; **inst** instrumental; **IO** indirect object; **IU** *i*-umlaut; **loc** locative; **m** masculine; **neg** negative; **N** noun; **n** neuter; **no** number; **NP** noun phrase; **nom** nominative; **O** object; **obl** oblique; **part** participle; **pl** plural; **pp** past participle; **pres** present; **prp** preposition; **pret** preterite; **rel** relative marker; **S** subject; **sg** singular; **subj** subjunctive; **T** theme; **tns** tense; **V** verb, vowel; **VL** Verner's Law; **voc** vocative; **WGG** West Germanic Gemination

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